

the three holds I have on ambassadorial nominations: Mr. Samuel Heins, who is nominated to be the U.S. Ambassador to Norway, and Ms. Azita Raji, who is nominated to be the U.S. Ambassador to Sweden. I believe both are qualified to represent our Nation abroad, and we have significant interests in Scandinavia. My hope is that both nominees receive a vote and are confirmed in the Senate sooner rather than later.

I will retain, however, the hold on President Obama's Ambassador to the Bahamas. This is because the Department of Justice has yet to initiate an investigation into the unauthorized access and dissemination of Congressman CHAFFETZ's personal records.

The DHS inspector general has testified to Congress that he believes criminal violations of the Privacy Act occurred. Secret Service Director Clancy, in his own testimony to Congress, agreed with the inspector general, acknowledging that the violations constituted, in his words, "a criminal offense." With such agreement between the Department of Homeland Security IG and the Secret Service Director, I retain the hope and fully expect that a criminal investigation of these offenses by the Department of Justice will be forthcoming.

That investigation and the discipline currently being meted out by the Department of Homeland Security are important to send the message that politically motivated crimes will not be tolerated. Consequences are needed to make clear that the separation of powers will be respected and that Members of Congress acting on behalf of the people will not be intimidated.

I also reserve the right to place new holds on future administration nominees. What we cannot have is impunity for criminal offenses. If the discipline for the Secret Service leadership is too weak or if a criminal investigation is not initiated, I may place additional holds in order to again remind the White House of the seriousness of this matter, but in the meantime I look forward to continuing to work with the administration to ensure that discipline is appropriate and a criminal investigation on this matter is initiated.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, having just finished the Thanksgiving holiday season, many of us had a chance

to be with our families and give thanks for all of the great goodness we have had showered on us as individuals and those lucky enough to live in this great Nation, but for many families this was a painful holiday weekend. It is sobering to realize how many American families have their lives impacted by gun violence in America every single day. Sadly, the past holiday weekend was no exception.

In my home State of Illinois, in the city of Chicago, gun violence has taken a devastating toll. There have been 436 homicides in Chicago this year—most of them by gunfire. In Chicago, the news this morning was that 8 people were killed and at least 20 others were wounded in shootings over the holiday weekend. Today the University of Chicago has closed its campus in Hyde Park because of a shooting threat that was made against the campus community. Classes and activities are canceled. Extra security has been provided. At a high school in Barrington, IL, in the suburbs of Chicago, students saw a lockdown after a student came to school with a gun and was arrested.

The fact is, there is too much gun violence in America. All across the country we have seen such terrible stories.

On Friday, in Biloxi, MS, a patron at a Waffle House restaurant shot and killed Julia Brightwell, a waitress, after she asked him not to smoke in the restaurant.

In Atlanta, on Saturday, 6-year-old Ja'Mecca Smith found a loaded handgun in the cushions of a sofa and fatally shot herself—6 years old.

In Rome, NY, a 7-month-old infant was shot and killed on Saturday when a nearby 18-year-old was cleaning and loading a shotgun that was discharged.

In Colorado Springs, CO, a gunman burst into a Planned Parenthood building and killed three people, including police officer Garrett Swasey, and wounded nine others. The Governor of Colorado called this domestic terrorism, and I agree.

An average of 297 Americans are shot every day, 89 of them fatally. They are shot in homicides, assaults, suicides, accidental shootings, mass shootings, and even domestic terrorism attacks like the one we just witnessed at the Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs. By one count, there have been at least 351 mass shootings in America so far this year—that is more than one every single day—and there have been more than 50 shootings in American schools so far this year. There are some people who think that the Founding Fathers, when they envisioned the future of America, envisioned an armed America with absolute, inviolate gun rights. I don't believe it. I don't believe for a minute they had any vision of this level of wanton violence which is taking place.

Several weeks ago, I joined with my Senate Democratic colleagues. We went to the steps of the Capitol and called on the Republican majority in the Senate to do something. We urged

Republicans to consider calling on the floor of the Senate—in light of all of this gun violence—commonsense reforms that would keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people.

Whether or not you own a gun, whether or not you hunt, whatever your view is of the Constitution, can't we all basically agree that people who have been convicted of a felony and those who are mentally unstable should not be allowed to buy a gun? That, to me, is just common sense. There are many people in my own family who are sportsmen and hunters and enjoy the firearms they bought as kids and went hunting with their dads and really appreciate it. It is part of the Midwestern culture. I have yet to meet a single person who owns a gun and uses it responsibly who doesn't agree with the statement that we should keep guns out of the hands of convicted felons and also out of the hands of those who are mentally unstable.

It is also hard to imagine why there is opposition to this issue. Did you know that even if you are on the government's terrorist watch list—a person who is suspected of terrorism—you can legally buy a gun in America? I am not talking about gun show loopholes, where there are no questions asked; I am talking about the law in America which allows suspected terrorists to buy firearms. In light of what happened in Paris, France, does it make sense that someone on the terrorist watch list can buy an assault weapon? God only knows where they would take it or what they would do with it and ultimately how many innocent people would be killed. We can't even have a conversation about that on the floor of the U.S. Senate. No way. The National Rifle Association would not approve. The gun lobby does not want us discussing these issues. We are talking about a Second Amendment absolute, inviolate right, in their eyes, and I think we are talking about something that is impossible to explain and defend, from my point of view.

I will stand up for Second Amendment rights—the rights of people to own and use guns responsibly and store them safely away from children. I will stand up for their rights, but we also have to come together and acknowledge that those who would misuse firearms because they have a criminal intent, with a criminal record, are mentally unstable, or are on a suspected terrorist watch list—for goodness' sake, we ought to be able to draw that line in the United States of America.

#### SYRIAN REFUGEES

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, it was just a few weeks ago that—I guess 10 days ago, actually—the Republican Presidential candidates went to the Presiding Officer's State to meet with religious leaders, Christian leaders, and were seeking their support. Of course they all want the support of everyone living in Iowa because the Iowa